Chapter 4: Birth

Exercise 4.1 — Reading with Insight

Q1 "I have done something; oh, God! I've done something real at last." Why does Andrew say this? What does it mean?

SOLUTION

Andrew says this at the end of the story, as he walks away from Number 12 Blaina Terrace in the early morning light, after successfully saving both Susan Morgan and her newborn child.

Throughout the night Andrew had been preoccupied with his own personal troubles — the disappointing evening with Christine, and his brooding thoughts about Bramwell, Page, and Denny and the failures of their marriages. He was listless, dull, and emotionally confused before the emergency fully seized his attention.

The birth presented a genuine crisis: the child arrived lifeless (asphyxia pallida), and Susan Morgan herself lay collapsed and near death. Andrew had to make a split-second choice between the mother and the child, attend to both, and ultimately resuscitate the baby after more than half an hour of relentless effort that others had already abandoned as hopeless.

The words express his sudden awareness that he has performed an act of real, life-giving consequence — not routine, not textbook, but a desperately hard-won victory over death. For a young doctor who had felt inwardly directionless that night, the miracle of the child's first cry sweeps away all self-doubt and gives him a profound sense of purpose and worth.

In short, the exclamation captures Andrew's transformation from an emotionally drifting young man into a committed physician who understands, for the first time, the true weight and meaning of his calling.

Answer: Andrew feels, for the first time, that his medical skill has achieved something genuinely meaningful — saving two lives — giving him a powerful sense of purpose that cuts through all his personal confusion.

Q2 There lies a great difference between textbook medicine and the world of a practising physician. Discuss.

SOLUTION

Textbook medicine presents disease, diagnosis, and treatment in orderly, controlled terms. Procedures are described step by step, outcomes are predictable when the correct protocol is followed, and the student can study at leisure with all the information laid out clearly.

The world of a practising physician is far more unpredictable and emotionally demanding, as Andrew's night at Blaina Terrace vividly illustrates. He arrives tired, emotionally troubled, and without any forewarning that the case would be unusual. He faces not one crisis but two simultaneously — a mother on the verge of collapse and a stillborn child — and must decide instantly which to address first.

No textbook can fully prepare a doctor for the physical exhaustion of working in a poorly furnished room by lamplight for hours, the psychological pressure of a desperate family

watching every move, or the terrifying moment when all effort seems to have failed and the midwife urges the doctor to stop.

It is also a practising physician's accumulated experience — not just booklearning — that saves the child. Andrew recalls "a case he once had seen in the Samaritan" and the treatment used there. That memory, retrieved under extreme stress, guides his improvised use of alternating hot and cold water baths.

The story suggests that real medical practice demands not only knowledge but also courage, perseverance, quick judgment, and the emotional strength to keep going even when hope seems lost. These qualities cannot be learned from a textbook alone; they are forged in actual experience.

Answer: Textbook medicine offers ordered knowledge; real medical practice demands improvisation under pressure, emotional resilience, and the courage to persist — qualities only experience can build, as Andrew's crisis-driven triumph shows.

Q3 Do you know of any incident when someone has been brought back to life from the brink of death through medical help. Discuss medical procedures such as organ transplant and organ regeneration that are used to save human life.

SOLUTION

Model answer: In the story itself, Andrew Manson brings a newborn back from clinical death using a method of alternating immersion in hot and cold water to stimulate breathing — a dramatic example of a doctor's refusal to give up being the decisive factor.

In real life, cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) is one of the most common ways people are brought back from the brink of death. When the heart stops, trained bystanders or paramedics can manually compress the chest to keep blood circulating until a defibrillator can restore the heart's normal rhythm. Many cardiac arrest survivors owe their lives to prompt CPR performed at the scene.

Organ transplantation is another landmark achievement of modern medicine. A failing heart, kidney, liver, or lung can be replaced with a healthy donor organ, giving the patient a second chance at life. India has seen a steady rise in successful heart and kidney transplants, and families who donate the organs of a brain-dead relative directly save other lives.

Organ regeneration is an emerging field in which scientists use stem cells or bioengineered scaffolds to grow replacement tissue — for instance, lab-grown skin grafts for burn victims, or cartilage repair for damaged joints. Researchers are working toward growing entire organs in the laboratory, which would eliminate the problem of donor shortages.

Other life-saving interventions include neonatal intensive care for premature babies, advanced ventilators for patients with respiratory failure, and targeted cancer therapies that have transformed once-fatal diagnoses into manageable conditions. Each of these reflects the same spirit Andrew embodies — refusing to accept death as inevitable.

Answer: Medical breakthroughs — CPR, organ transplants, stem-cell therapies — echo Andrew's story: determined human effort, guided by knowledge and experience, can push back the boundary between life and death.